

## On the Ancient Font at Wilne.

By GEORGE BAILEY.

THE Ancient Crosses and Stones of Derbyshire have been the subject of several articles in this *Journal*. The stone which forms the Font at Wilne is one of the most unique. It has more than once been written on in this *Journal* by Dr. Browne, late Bishop of Bristol.<sup>1</sup> Since then the fire at Wilne Church on March 7th, 1917, has much injured it, and the present writer who made the drawing which appears in Dr. Cox's *Churches of Derbyshire*<sup>2</sup> having lately succeeded in discovering what the curious carvings really represent wishes to put on record his interpretation of them. This could not have continued a mystery so long had Dr. Browne sooner discovered that those who turned this piece of pillar into a font had placed the stone upside down, so that nothing could be suggested as to the subject of the carving though various attempts had been made to explain them. The object of this article is to suggest a meaning of the various pictures carved on this stone.

I. and V. In the Garden of Eden were two trees. One, that "of the knowledge of good and evil," the other was the "Tree of Life." These are both represented on the font by a conventional tree, on each side of which are

<sup>1</sup> See Vols. vii., p. 185, where he has given a sketch of the carvings, and viii., pp. 165-166.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. iv., p. 400. See also photo. of the font by Mr. le Blanc Smith, Vol. xxv., p. 218, of this *Journal*...

two birds. This subject frequently occurs in ancient ecclesiastical work such as tiles, vestments, &c. In some cases instead of a tree a cup is substituted as appears on fragments of vestments at Worcester Cathedral and illustrated by Henry Shaw, F.S.A., Pickering, 1858, in his fine work on *Tiles and Pavements* in which he gives an elaborate tile from Jervaulx Abbey, Yorkshire.

II. Then a very elaborately designed figure of a dragon follows which probably represents the tempter, Satan. It is a most ingenious device, evincing great ability on the part of the artist.

III. This is followed by an equally elaborate representation of a swan, the idea of motion being well rendered. This may be taken to indicate the Flood and the ark, which preserved Noah and his family, bearing the fortunes of a new world.

IV. The next appears to be a man in armour with a sword, his hand held up in the attitude of deprecation. It probably represents the angel—Michael the Militant—standing here to defend the Tree of Life then follows as No. V. and it is concluded in the last of the series by the Virgin and Child. It was the custom from the earliest times to tell stories in the form of riddles. The earliest of these enigmatic sayings is in *Genesis*, iii., 15: "It shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel." As the scriptures abound in them, it need be no matter of surprise that the ancients easily read the meanings of these strange sculptures which we find on ancient stones, misereres both inside and outside our ancient churches, most of which depict in rude fashion the triumph of the Gospel of Christ over the Dragon. An especially rudely incised one is on the Font at Tissington.

With respect to the Font at Wilne, Dr. Browne considers it to be of early date, as the parochial rights of the parish were transferred to Sawley in 822. The writer's sketch in vol. iv. of Dr. Cox's *Churches* will be better

read if turned upside down owing to its having been drawn before the discovery by Dr. Browne alluded to above, where it will be seen that the mysterious figures are the feet of men whose bodies are non-existent.

---